

OUR ECONOMY *needs* IMMIGRATION

District Work Memo prepared by Congresswoman Veronica Escobar

Context

The last time Congress passed immigration reform was in 1996, and that was driven by Republicans and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. That bill eliminated several legal immigration pathways, essentially making fewer people eligible for legal status while making more people deportable.

In 2013, the Senate passed a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill that would've expanded legal pathways and provided a historic amount of funding for border security. House Republicans, led by the Freedom Caucus, torpedoed that bill.

Republicans have said they refuse to pass any comprehensive reform legislation until the border is "secure", a tactic they've been using since the W. Bush administration to hold up real reform.

Since then, the federal government has been following the Republican strategy on immigration reform: focusing on immigration solely at the border, providing billions of dollars in "border security," building walls, increasing personnel, and rapid expulsion policies (like Title 42 and MPP). In 2019, the Trump Administration attempted to use cruel policies like family separation as a "deterrent." None of those policies have deterred or curbed migration.

Today, most of those border policies are still in place, with the exception of the Trump Administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP or "remain in Mexico") and their horrific family separation policy.

Most – not all – of the migrants coming to the border have no other legal pathway (you have to come to the border to declare your intent to seek asylum). They are not "illegals" as reporters and some members of Congress have claimed. They are individuals seeking asylum, which is a legal right.

But the system was not set up for this kind of volume, which I have called unsustainable.

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What has the Biden Administration done?

Despite what Republicans keep saying, the Biden Administration is doing the hard work that should've been done years ago:

- Aggressively worked on [combating human trafficking](#), and he's already achieved [great success](#) (and there is certainly more to come). This is more than any other president has done on this front.
- Empowering immigration agents to adjudicate asylum cases. He inherited a broken asylum system that has a 6-8 year backlog (which was already bad but worsened under Trump).
 - The asylum officers will be [adjudicating those cases](#) within 18 months.
- Bringing [together leaders from the Western Hemisphere](#) and forging an agreement on migration, which is impacting every country in our hemisphere -- this isn't just America's challenge.
- Working to reimburse border NGOs and local governments for costs associated with caring for migrants.

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What more should be done?

Congress must legislate – we need comprehensive immigration reform. Our immigration laws have not been updated since 1996! In both the 116th and 117th Congress, House Democrats have passed some immigration reform bills, but Republicans in the Senate continue to successfully prevent Congress from doing its job on immigration reform by refusing to advance these bills.

Secretary Blinken can and should reinstate in-country processing, which would ease some of the pressure at the border by allowing people to seek asylum while in their home country, preventing the need for them to make the dangerous journey to the border (The Trump administration eliminated in-country process). I have sent a letter to Secretary Blinken asking him to do this.

We can better utilize our Border Patrol agents at the border AND process migrants humanely. I have a bill that does this.

Currently, hundreds of Border Patrol agents are taken off the line of duty in order to offer care for migrants in their custody at Central Processing Centers (CPCs). This makes the border less secure. My bill would make it so that CPCs would be staffed by the appropriate civilian personnel who are better equipped to handle vulnerable populations, which would allow Border Patrol agents to get back to their jobs: securing the border.

Congress should expand the universe and streamline the process of those eligible for work visas.

Today, we have thousands of migrants throughout the country waiting for their asylum hearings who cannot apply for work authorization from USCIS for nearly 6 months. At the same time, our country has a labor shortage. Agriculture, food preparation, hospitality, and other sectors are begging for workers. There's no reason why this ready workforce should sit idle for 6 months to wait for work authorization. Chellie Pingree has a bill that shortens the time to 30 days.

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Chellie and I sent a letter to Secretary Mayorkas advocating for the last two bullets (civilianizing the processing of migrants AND providing work authorization in 30 days instead of 6 months).

There are a number of other solutions and bills, but in-country processing would ease some of the pressure at the border right now and prevent people from risking their lives to travel north, modernizing our border processing centers would better utilize our border patrol to secure the border, and allowing access to work visas and providing 30-day work authorization would help address our labor shortage and fight inflation.

What do Republicans want to do?

Republicans have advocated for the same thing for 25 years: prevent immigration reform while only focusing on the border.

We are currently living with the consequences of doing it their way for over two decades and this approach has been a clear failure.

Nothing anyone does will change this overnight.

Dangers of Republican Control

If Republicans regain control of Congress: things will only get worse because they've promised to rely on the same failed border policies that have done nothing but make us less safe.

If Democrats maintain and expand control, we can continue to address this situation in a way that will meaningfully face the challenges and opportunities before us.

WANT TO SEE THIS MESSAGING IN ACTION? WATCH HERE!

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The Border Republicans Built

by Congresswoman Escobar

For decades, Republicans have stalled immigration reform legislation, arguing that we must “secure the border” first. And for decades, Democrats cooperated, voting in favor of building walls, increasing the Department of Homeland Security budget to historic levels, and recently, some Democrats even joined Republicans in calling on the Biden administration to continue the rapid expulsion policies begun by Donald Trump.

None of this has prevented or slowed migration and it should now be clear that the Republican strategy – addressing immigration at the border – has been an expensive and tragic failure.

Despite this, Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy promised this week that if Republicans regain the majority in November, they have no intention of passing immigration reform and will continue to only focus on the border. This will be disastrous for our country.

Limiting legal pathways means immigrants have no “line” to get into, no “right way” to immigrate. So they migrate using irregular, more dangerous pathways. This is the border Republicans have built.

2,000 migrants per day

Over the decades, El Pasoans have seen the consequences of that strategy. This summer has been especially challenging. For the last three months, we’ve seen more than 1,000 migrants arriving per day. During September and October, those numbers have climbed to nearly 2,000 people per day, the majority being Venezuelan migrants fleeing economic disaster in their home country.

For years, asylum-seekers have been released by CBP to non-profits like Annunciation House (and most recently local governments), who fill a humanitarian gap left by the federal government and help migrants get to their sponsors in different parts of the country. But the more people who arrive, the greater the stress on the community.

Less than two years into his administration, President Biden is doing more than any other administration to tackle migration issues: working with hemispheric partners to get to root causes; collaborating with neighboring countries also impacted by growing numbers of refugees; reimbursing local communities and NGOs for costs incurred (a first); and launching an unprecedented effort to dismantle human trafficking organizations.

Even so, this isn’t enough. We must do more.

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Immigration will help labor shortage

First, we should recognize that immigration will help address today's (and tomorrow's) labor shortage. Immigration keeps us competitive, helps adequately fund important programs like Social Security and, given the state of the economy, it can ease supply chain and inflationary pressures as well.

During my visits with migrants both in Border Patrol custody and at the city and county processing centers, I met a number of professionals – accountants, electricians, a chef, construction workers. I even met a music professor. All of them spoke of the broken economies in their homeland and all came seeking work.

If Congress is unable to pass immigration reform or expand and streamline work visas because of Republican intransigence, the administration should allow these asylum-seekers to gain work permits within 30 days instead of the six months they currently have to wait. Employers need the help, migrants can and should be able to sustain themselves with a good job while they await their asylum hearings, and their employment would ease the pressures on the communities welcoming them.

Our outdated processing system at the border also needs to be reformed.

Get agents to their mission

In 2019, my first year in Congress, I brought nearly 20% of Congress to the border to tour facilities and see first-hand what Congressional inaction had led to. I immediately noticed that border patrol agents were performing functions at the Central Processing Centers (CPC) that could and should be performed by civilians, like data entry and care-giving of the migrants. It was inconceivable to me that men and women with a gun and a badge were being taken away from their duties on the border to care for vulnerable populations. This practice makes our border less secure.

It was then that I championed the creation of a civilian workforce (professionals called Processing Coordinators) to help get agents back to their mission. I'm advocating to expand on this success and completely civilianize the CPC workforce altogether. And we can go further: add humanitarian and legal support, and incorporate the work being done by NGOs and local governments into that processing. This would not only ensure agents are focused on the border but would also relieve local governments of a federal responsibility, creating a more efficient, safe border.

Finally, the State Department should reinstate in-country processing, a practice eliminated by the Trump administration. This would prevent some migrants from making the treacherous journey north.

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No quick fix

These are but a few examples of the work Congress needs to do. There is no single solution, no easy answer, and no quick fix to decades of failed policy.

It's frustrating that Congress hasn't acted and that some politicians seek to exploit the situation. The last best effort to reform our outdated system came and went in 2013 when the Senate presented the House with a bipartisan compromise that would both offer legal pathways and unprecedented sums for border security.

But that bill failed in the House because of the far-right members who wanted to focus only on border security. Some of the same Republicans who complain the loudest about the border are the same politicians who derailed that effort.

I'm grateful to the El Paso community and leaders who focus on collaboration and solutions and who are committed to addressing our challenges with humanity and dignity. And those politicians who use our community as a prop while offering only misinformation or no solutions at all should be held to account.

We are a nation of immigrants. We can create a system that is fair, efficient, and strategic. But it will require that we abandon the nativism that drives much of the debate today. It will require that we hold Congress accountable and that Americans accept and be patient about the hard work ahead. It will require us to be honest about the failures of the past.

Or not.

What's that saying about doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result?

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Sample Copy.

- ➔ Congress has failed to act on immigration reform for 30 years!

We've seen that walls, military-like tactics, decreased legal pathways, and rapid expulsion policies do not work. We've tried it the Republican way for 3 decades, we can and must do better.

- ➔ From agriculture and restaurants to retail and wholesale, immigrants are essential to our labor force.

As our country continues to grapple with the labor shortage, it's time for Congress to take action toward meaningful immigration reform.

- ➔ Immigrants keep food on our tables - literally.

They are a vital part of our labor force which is continuing to struggle with a historic shortage. it's time for Congress to take action toward meaningful immigration reform.

- ➔ Immigrants are an essential part of our labor force.

With over 11.3 million job openings in July 2022, it's more important than ever that we have the labor we need to keep growing our economy. #OurEconomyNeedsImmigration

- ➔ Republicans claim they'll "secure the border" but have proven they'll simply double down on the same failed policies that have done nothing but make us less safe over the past 30 years.

It's time for change.

- ➔ Did you know that if farmers lost foreign-born workers, the prices of milk would nearly double?

Immigrants are an essential part of our labor force. #OurEconomyNeedsImmigration

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Graphics:

➔ [Google Drive](#)



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Retail milk prices would *nearly double* if farmers lost foreign-born workers

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According to Texas A&M AgLife



Despite making up just 17% of Texas' population, immigrants comprised 21.9% of the workforce.

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July 2022 reported 11.3 million job openings, which are accelerating inflation and aggravating supply chain challenges.

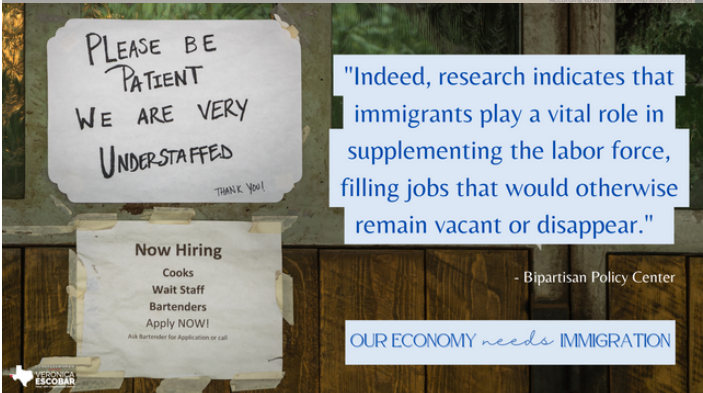
According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



"The increase in the immigrant population has helped strengthen and grow the already massive Texas labor force"

- American Immigration Council

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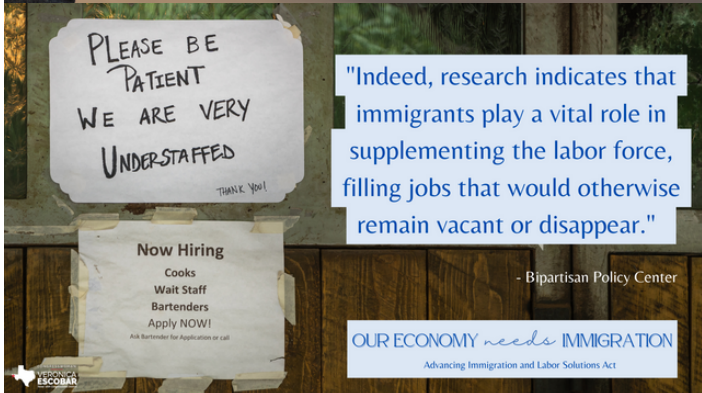
PLEASE BE PATIENT
WE ARE VERY UNDERSTAFFED
THANK YOU!

Now Hiring
Cooks
Wait Staff
Bartenders
Apply NOW!
Ask Bartender for Application or call

"Indeed, research indicates that immigrants play a vital role in supplementing the labor force, filling jobs that would otherwise remain vacant or disappear."

- Bipartisan Policy Center

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Advancing Immigration and Labor Solutions Act



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Immigrants made up 22% of all total Accommodation and Food Services employees in 2018

According to Migration Policy Institute



Immigrants made up 26% of all Essential Retail and Wholesale Industries employees in 2018

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According to Migration Policy Institute